

Jonah 3:10-4:11
Matthew 20:1-16

Are We Ever Pleased?
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Our texts today deal with people who are angry at God (landowner) for being God! It is amazing how we applaud God for being God when God's grace and love is focused on us but when it deals with other people, especially people who are different than we are we become angry with God. When it deals with people who are not as good as we think we are or with those who do not work as hard as we do -- then we question God's judgment and grace. Surely they don't deserve grace like we do. Jonah thought that of the people of Nineveh.

What do we do when God demonstrates grace? Nineveh was a pagan city with a pagan culture. Its people were not Hebrews. Why should God care for these people? Jonah runs in the other direction when called to go and share a message from God with them. He is a good Jewish boy and to go to a Gentile city with people who are not like him would make him unclean. However, Jonah ends up in Nineveh, thanks to a big storm and a bigger fish! There he preaches his message of doom. God is mad and you are done for! Much to Jonah's surprise the people listen and repent and as they do God responds in grace.

God's response angers Jonah. He has wasted his time. Why should God show grace to these people? Why send Jonah to preach a message of destruction and then repent and love them? Jonah in his anger sits and waits for the city to be destroyed -- maybe God will come to his senses. And as he waits a plant grows, gives him shade from the hot sun and then the next day it dies. Jonah gets angry at God because the plant dies. From God a simple question to Jonah: If you are so concerned about this plant should I not be concerned about these people?

Jesus tells a parable. Each of the workers agrees to the terms of the landowner when they are hired. Each group comes to work at a different time in the day and each gives to the landowner what they agreed to do: A day's labor, a half-day's labor and an hour of work. Now it is time for them to be paid and each receives the same amount. There is anger from those who have toiled all day and who get the same wages as the ones who worked less hours. They worked through the hot blazing sun. The landowner responds that each of them agreed to work for the amount of pay they were getting. The landowner keeps his agreement with each one of them. They are not upset with the amount of wages they received but are upset with the grace of the landowner toward the others. God's grace is the same for all who would come.

These two Scripture passages raise the question: Are we ever pleased? Our God is a God of grace, forgiveness and love - we know that from the grace we have received. Jesus said it simply, "*For God so loved the world...*" God's love was not for one nation or one people; God's love is for the whole world. The events of 9/11 have caused some to hate and distrust another people. We may not even be convinced that God loves them. Many hate a people or ethnic group that had nothing to do with the events of that day. But because they are _____ they must be guilty. Now, we don't like to be lumped in a basket with _____. And yet we are often guilty of making such groupings and judgments. Yet, our God calls to us love.

Like Jonah we long for their destruction and then God comes with grace and some get angry. Even though we want to be forgiven we don't want to forgive or want God to forgive those who are not like us.

Is this time not an opportunity for us to again live out God's grace? Is this not a time when we need to be reaching out in acts of love and caring? We were once outside and someone loved us enough to bring us inside. Now again we have the opportunity to demonstrate the love and grace of God. It is not easy -- no one ever should say it is -- but if we are followers of Christ we need to hear again Christ's words from the cross, "*Father, forgive them...*" We have been forgiven, even from those times when we know what we are doing! We need to hear again God's question to Jonah, "*Should I not be concerned about that great {pagan} city?*" [{} mine].